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DEPARTMENT FOR IO AND WHA/CEN

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [UN](#) [UNMIC](#) [PGOV](#) [YL](#) [PM](#)
SUBJECT: PANAMA SUPPORTIVE BUT WARY ON KOSOVO

REF: STATE 47794

Classified By: AMBASSADOR WILLIAM EATON FOR REASONS 1.4 B AND D

¶1. (C) "Rest assured, we're on the same page" on Kosovo future status, First VP and FM Samuel Lewis told Ambassador Eaton and POLOFF when he delivered reftel demarche on April

¶12. Lewis expressed Panamanian support of the UNMIK Administrator's recommendations -- including independence -- but acknowledged Panama was waiting to see the text of the proposal before pledging full public support. Panamanian Senior Advisors for UNSC Affairs Nils Castro and Adolfo Ahumada accompanied Lewis.

¶2. (C) Lewis said that based on his conversations with Ambassador Ricardo Arias in New York, Panama's primary concern revolves around the threat of Russia exercising its veto power. Lewis opined that if the Russians perceive they have been given adequate opportunity to express their concerns on Kosovo, they will abstain from voting on the UNSCR, telling the Serbs they have "exhausted all other possible alternatives on Kosovo." He added that Russia was pushing for a fact-finding mission to the region, but Ambassador countered that after Ahtisaari's 20 rounds of talks in 16 months with the Belgrade-Pristina governments, even Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon does not endorse further rounds of negotiations and discussion.

¶3. (C) Ambassador also noted that Panama's public silence could be misinterpreted and only embolden the Russians to dig in their heels. Lewis agreed there is "no way back" to reunifying Kosovo and Serbia, calling Kosovo independence a "reality," stating he would send a message to Arias in New York to deliver an explicit (but private) message of Panama's support for internationally-supervised Kosovo independence to remove any possible misconceptions of Panama's position. Lewis added that Panama would not undermine the ability to work behind the scenes with Russia, but wanted to see the text before publicly endorsing any resolution.

¶4. (C) When asked if Panama had any specific issues, concerns, or text they would like to see addressed in the resolution, Castro replied that Panama wanted to avoid another outcome similar to Burma by spending the sufficient amount of time to build consensus around the resolution, noting that "Panama is not concerned about the concept, but the speed at which a resolution is drafted." Castro also noted that Panama wished to see a "discrete transition to independence" in which the "symbols of independence" were introduced delicately and sensitively to avoid antagonizing the various ethnic groups within Kosovo. Castro opined this process could take months, but Ambassador again countered that while the USG also supports the gradual transition to an internationally-supervised independent Kosovo, the status quo cannot be perpetuated indefinitely without spawning unrest

that could destabilize the Balkans once again.

¶5. (C) On 11 April, POLOFF delivered similar reftel talking points to MFA working level official Ernesto Cerrud, who paralleled the response that Panama does not wish to "force the issue" on Kosovo independence, and would prefer to await the results of the Russian-led fact-finding mission to the region before deciding to vote on a resolution. Cerrud's comments mirrored those of Lewis, underscoring the Panamanian paranoia that Russia will veto any resolution that is not supported by Belgrade.

¶6. (C) Comment: Lewis and his advisors commented several times they didn't want a repeat of the Burma resolution vetoed by China. Local press painted this veto as a personal embarrassment and setback for Lewis. As a Presidential hopeful to succeed Martin Torrijos, Lewis is even more cautious now than usual about press and public perceptions of him. Lewis may also be concerned that creating a rift between Panama and Russia vis a vis a vetoed Kosovo resolution could damage the effectiveness of his planned tour of Europe in May which includes a stop in Moscow. Nevertheless, Lewis received our message clearly, and knows he cannot hide in the shadows or the sideline on this issue. However, the local Panamanian UNSC team may be willing to stall the resolution signing process as long as possible. We will continue to pressure Panama to take a stand. Continued pressure on Ambassador Arias will also underscore the seriousness of our resolve on this issue.

EATON